

# POWER TO SAVE

FREDERICK M. MORRIS

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# *Power to Save*

*Those mighty acts of God  
in Christ crucified whereby  
alone we are saved  
for life and immortality*

BY FREDERICK M. MORRIS

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TO  
D. Q. M.

WHO HAS TAUGHT ME MUCH  
ABOUT THE SAVING POWER  
OF LOVE

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we . . . bless  
thee . . . above all for thine inestimable love in the  
redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*

*i*

## *Power to Save*

ON GOOD FRIDAY Christendom gathers again to contemplate the profound and compelling mystery of the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ and to worship before the astonishing and irresistible Cross.

We bow down and worship before that Cross for two reasons. First, because we, who are Christians, have made that tremendously significant decision and commitment whereby we put our whole trust and confidence in that mighty act of God as the only assurance of salvation and as the only source of the true power to save. But we also bow down and worship before the Cross because we, as human beings, whether committed Christians or not, are haunted by the inescapable surmise that there is a message from the Cross to something very deep and fundamental within the soul of mankind. Nothing has ever happened in the world

which has come anywhere near to stirring and disturbing the hearts of men to the same extent. The incredible proclamation of divine redemption being wrought right there in time and space finds an almost compulsive response within us.

People are suspecting more and more that the real power and glory of the Christian religion and the true light of its message to the benighted souls of wayward humanity center in the Crucifixion. This is really a rediscovery of what an earlier generation took for granted. People are increasingly disillusioned with all attempts, so general in the past fifty years or more, to preach the Christian Gospel as though the Cross were not central or as though the doctrine of the Atonement could be watered down or side-stepped without desperately weakening the relevance of the Word. And so we approach the Crucifixion with increasingly penitent hearts and increasingly humble expectancy, eager to hear anew the message which has laid its spell so powerfully upon the hearts and wills of men during the most vigorous periods of Christian history.

As we begin our time before the Cross, on this solemn anniversary of reverent and grateful remembrance, we are to be reminded first of all that God has something to say to you and to me. He has something to say that is above and beyond anything He has said to us before. Every time we come together in the presence of God, He seeks to say something to us which means growth and increasing light—something more than we have been able to hear before, something deeper and more poignant and more beautiful than any earlier comprehension has permitted. Therefore we must be as fully expectant and as fully receptive as is humanly possible. We must go out to meet him as far as we can.



If we can bring ourselves to forget the passing of time for a little while, to put out of our minds the pressure of the engagements or appointments we may have, and to accept the discipline of a sustained attempt to listen carefully, not to me, but to him who, we believe, deigns to make use of an ordinary mortal for the conveying of his message, we shall come nearest to hearing what He wants to say to us.

Our general subject is "Power to Save," and we shall seek to discover something of what his seven last words from the Cross have to say about that. Power to save! That is the kind of power which really matters, isn't it? There are many kinds of power. There is power to mutilate and to destroy. There is power to condemn and to enslave. There is power to pollute and to pervert. There is power to corrupt and to brutalize. Then there is the power of engines and machines, the power which can be used for the temporal good or evil of mankind and which we have ingeniously multiplied to an incredible extent. And, finally, there is the power of the nuclear universe which we have learned to unleash and to direct in a magnitude of brute power before which the human imagination stands paralyzed, unable to encompass even the bare outline of its potential.

And then there is the power to save—and that is something utterly different. It cannot be measured in any terms applicable to the kinds of power we have just been considering; but it is far greater and far more significant in the realm of eternal values than all the other forms of power rolled into one. No physical or material power can save a man's soul, not even the ultimate, theoretical extreme of an imagined harnessing of all the nuclear power inherent in the universe. And that makes all the more astonishing the Christian affir-

mation that from the Cross of Christ there streams out into all the world this power to save. To gain some insight into that mystery is the purpose of these meditations.

Well, what does it mean to be saved? What do we mean by power to save? *From* what must a man be saved, and *for* what must a man be saved?

First, what must we be saved from? We must be saved, to begin with, from being lost; that is, from floundering aimlessly without purpose or direction in life without knowing where our home is or how to get there. We must be saved from the bedevilling guilt and anxiety and insecurity and psychoses which can make a person's inner life a veritable hell from which he knows not where to turn for escape. We must be saved from the egotism and the viciousness of pride which contaminate and stupefy and finally destroy our manhood. We must be saved from the follies and vanities, the blindnesses and stupidities which corrupt and finally demolish our divine birthright.

Secondly, what must we be saved for? We must be saved for our place in heaven, for our continuing growth through eternity toward those promises of God which pass human understanding. We must be saved for light and goodness, for beauty and nobility and fulfillment, and for love—yes, above all for love! We must be saved for the wearing of the crown of flame in the presence of the angels in heaven. We must be saved for the glory and honor and dignity and splendor, which is God's will for his redeemed children, and above all for love. For God is love. And he that loveth deeply, warmly, generously and persistently fulfills the intent of God, and moves toward the splendor of fruition for which his heavenly Father intended him from the foundation of the earth. That



is what a man must be saved for. And no battleship or aircraft carrier, no ballistic missile or space ship—not even the most powerful ever conceived in the most fantastic flights of human imagination—can do anything to save a man *from* that which threatens his soul, nor *for* that which is his eternal destiny both here and beyond.

Nor can a man save himself. Ah, there is the hardest truth for him to accept! For unless and until he has been beaten and chastened, until he has been frightened and frustrated and defeated to the point of being at his wit's end, and of knowing himself to be beyond human resourcefulness, his pride and his egotism keep on insisting that he can save himself. And so he tries to find salvation in learning and in skill and in progress, in cunning and in science, in material possessions, in prestige and in power, in pleasure and indulgence. But none of these things can save. None of them mark the path to life. None of them, attractive and plausible as they often seem, can bring healing or assurance to the depths of a man's sore and afflicted heart.

The core of the Christian Gospel is that the Cross alone can save. Only from the Cross flows the power that can save. It is not simple or easy or obvious. But a man must indeed be brutally hardened or a swinish clod, if he can look clearly at the Cross without a stirring within the depths of him which seems to whisper that it *might* be true.

And so, let us seek to find some light and understanding of why it is that our religion declares the Cross to be the source of the power which can save.

*O Almighty God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication;*

*Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*O God, our heavenly Father, who art strong to save and quick to have mercy; Speak to us anew in this our solemn commemoration of the Passion of our Lord. Make our hearts receptive and expectant as we seek to gain light and understanding from our contemplation of the holy mystery of the Cross. Deepen our conviction and our commitment to Him who is our only hope of salvation, that we may be saved from aimlessness, anxiety, guilt and pride and brought to that glorious liberty of truth and light and love so wonderfully revealed in the person of thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*



# *The Power of Forgiveness*

THERE ARE various kinds of power which are vividly demonstrated in the event which we are commemorating and witnessing today.

First there is the dramatic evidence of political power which appears to be having its unopposed way with devastating finality. The mighty empire of Rome reaches out in the person of its representative, Pontius Pilate, to an obscure province on the frontier of civilization to quell a social disturbance created by a strange man in conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities of his nation. The power of the empire was unqualified. It was the power of life and death. And the little man at the center of this disturbance was powerless to defy or to alter its course. So it seemed.

Here was military power too. And it was, in relation to the times and the circumstances of history, one of the greatest and most successful concentrations of military power ever created. At this time it was invincible, as it had been all over the world for a long, long time preceding. It was the agent of the political power whence its orders originated. And it now proceeds with the casual and ordinary business of snuffing out a human life because that life was politically undesirable.

As we draw closer to the immediate business of implementing the political and military power, we see another kind of power—the power of strong backs and well muscled arms seizing hold of a man's body to mutilate it with nails driven through hands and feet into the wood of a gallows. Then that same power lifts the gallows quite easily and drops it with a wrenching jolt into a hole in the ground so that it stands upright in the fierce noontime heat of the semi-tropical sun which will soon burn the life out of the tortured body. These forms of power, which we see exercised here, seem very total and very final.

But as all this business of exercising power upon the life and liberty of a man begins, He speaks. And He calls attention to an entirely different kind of power. He speaks words of compassion and love and forgiveness at a time when one has every right to cry out with pain, and when no one would be critical of him were He to let loose a stream of invective and vituperation. That He speaks as He does and behaves as He does demonstrates a power of the spirit which towers above these other forms of power so far that they cannot touch it and before which a person, with any degree of sensitivity at all, will bow down in reverence. Here is a



power to touch and cleanse and ennoble the hearts of men.

*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

We become aware of another kind of power which now seems incomparably great and important. The power to forgive. And that is indispensable power. For it is the power to save about which we are thinking particularly today. No man can be saved except he be forgiven. Forgiveness is a *sine qua non* of redemption. If a man is not forgiven, he is lost. And, sooner or later, every mortal soul comes to the point where he knows that if he be not assured of forgiveness, he can no longer tolerate the prospect of living. And he begins to see the power to save in its true perspective as the power of all powers that matters most. It is not enough that a man forgive himself. It is not enough that he be forgiven by his fellow men, even the victims of his wrongdoing or his neglect. He must be forgiven by God. He must be assured of the reality of the power to save. Nothing else will do and no other power appears important.

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Here is both the proclamation and the exercise of that power to save. For here we see the nature of the eternal God revealed in human life. Now we can be assured that ours is the kind of God who forgives because He loves every one of his children with an incredible, undefeatable love. The knowledge and assurance that one is beloved is a power for salvation almost beyond the capacity of a person to comprehend. To be loved truly is to be forgiven. Unforgiving love is a contradiction in terms.

We can see a small reflection of all this in our own experience, and it can lead us to a measure of understanding. A little child offends or disobeys his mother. He sees in her eyes

something of the hurt and suffering he has caused and he experiences the incipient pangs of shame and remorse. The brokenness of the relationship becomes increasingly intolerable until he casts himself into her arms begging to be forgiven and restored. The forgiveness had already been granted but now he is able to appropriate it and to experience healing and salvation. If she were to have rejected him at this point, the damage to the immortal souls of two people would have been incalculable. If the mother is wise enough, she does not turn aside the consequences of his misdoing; nor does she avoid the infliction of punishment by her own hand, if the consequences will not of themselves cause punishment. She knows the therapeutic necessity of punishment. And because he knows that the relationship has been restored, he can accept and profit by his punishment and there will not be disastrous consequences. The forgiveness saves. The punishment strengthens and purifies.

Brethren, if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give good gifts to them who ask!

As we become aware of the power of God's incredible mercy toward ourselves, expressed in these first words from the Cross, we find within our hearts the power to attempt the way of love and forgiveness toward one another. And it takes courage and grace and divine help really to step out on that way. For we are, by nature, so afraid to attempt it. We fear rejection and misunderstanding. We fear the threat to our own egos that we see in one another. A host of reservations and misgivings assails our perverse hearts. But as we become more deeply grateful for having been put in the way of salvation, we seek more earnestly to walk in that way by



the practise of forgiveness in our relations with our brethren.

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Can we now begin to see something of what is meant by the power to save which flows from the Cross of our blessed Redeemer? Can we now begin to see the difference between temporal power and eternal power? Can we now begin to see afresh the power of love which towers over every other form of power and which triumphs here on Calvary in calm disregard of all the combined forces seeking to destroy it or to deny it?

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Father, forgive me that I might be delivered from evil and saved for love.

*Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*Dear Lord and Saviour of mankind, who didst pray for thy tormentors in the midst of thine anguish and didst show forth thy power to save even as thy body was seized by the murderous power of the world; Forgive us our deadly ignorance of what we do. We have erred and strayed from thy*

*ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws; And there is no health in us. Strengthen and help us to find forgiveness of our trespasses in seeking to forgive those who trespass against us. Show us the way to love our enemies and to pray for them that persecute us, that we may enter into the way of salvation by thy mercy, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever.*

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## *The Power of Contrition*

ON EITHER SIDE of Jesus were crucified two other men who were by no means weaklings. They demonstrated a kind of power which is not to be scorned or belittled. They met the overwhelming display of political, military and physical power with another kind which is not without cause for admiration. They hurled invective into the teeth of the soldiers and threw back the taunts of their tormentors with defiant ribaldry even as the nails were driven into their flesh, and even as the upthrust of the gallows tore loose the ligaments of their limbs.

That is power of a sort, and it evokes a certain degree of applause in the eyes of the same people who would avert



their faces in shame before any spectacle of cringing capitulation or cries for mercy. Here is the power to endure pain without whining, without yielding to fear or panic, refusing utterance to the pent-up moans of anguish, refusing to let the spirit be whipped. And it is no small matter. Only a coward or a braggart would dare to make light of that kind of power. It is called, "Taking one's punishment like a man."

But is it? Like a man? Like a man at his best? What about the man in the center? Isn't that a better way? He, too, utters no cry for mercy, no moan of anguish. Like the others, He does not cringe or whine. There is no evidence of fear or panic in him either. But instead of invective, He gives voice to love and care and compassion for those around him. And this is so obviously genuine and so apparently from the heart, that in anyone who is able to look and listen it arouses reverent wonder if not adoration. We know that this is taking one's punishment like a man at his best. This is manhood at its highest and finest, the very sight of which has the power to transform and to save. For here is the power of love, welling up in an irresistible stream and embracing with compassion the lost and misguided souls about him. And even the thieves saw it with respect and felt its power to save. At least one of them did, and the light broke upon him in a flood. He knew that this man could save him not from his present pain, nor from the predicament in which his physical life was involved, nor from approaching death—but from his lostness, his aimlessness, his guilt, his shame, his deep inner misgivings and insecurity. And he knew now that above everything else he wanted to be saved from all that. This thief saw a new kind of power, and he saw it in a new light. The power of the soldiers and the power of his own stoical



courage paled before this power of the spirit which he now saw. The presence of Jesus and the power of his spirit evoked contrition in the heart of the thief. And contrition is an aspect of the power to save.

Now, the thief called him "Lord." "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," he said. "None can call Him Lord save by the Holy Ghost," writes St. Paul. And so we see this man responding to the heavenly vision and taking his place in history beside St. Peter who bore the same witness at Caesarea Philippi when he said, "Thou art the Christ." And the reply of our Lord in both cases is of the same essence. To Peter, He said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

And to the thief He said, *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

In both cases He acknowledged his own nature and reached out to touch the life of the man concerned, with saving power. The thief experienced the grace of contrition and penitence. He was ready to relinquish his self-reliance, to abandon his self-righteousness and to forsake his pride. And that is, indeed, a facet of the power to save. We do not often think of penitence as power. We are more inclined to confuse strength with stubbornness, to confuse courage with pigheadedness, to confuse power with the refusal to capitulate. At the same time we are inclined to regard humility and penitence and contrition as weaknesses or, at best, as softer virtues. But these qualities of spirit have the power to change a man's inner life, and that is the power to save. Contrition can purify and sanctify the sinful nature of a man, and that is the power to save. Certainly this is a very different kind of strength which now shows itself in the thief from

that which he demonstrated in his defiance and his stoical endurance of pain. But the strength of defiance leads to no end result, while the strength of contrition leads to salvation.

We have said that the unforgiven man is a lost man and that a man must be forgiven and must know himself to be forgiven if he is to be saved. But forgiveness comes to fruition in a man's life only as the result of his self-giving in penitence. And so it is that penitence, as well as forgiveness, is an aspect of the power to save. That the Cross has the capacity to evoke penitence is another evidence of its saving power. The thief, looking upon the crucified Lord, knew that something had happened to him and thereby became the first of all the subsequent generations of men to find himself being saved by the power of the Cross.

A weak man seeks security in self-righteousness and in the refusal to admit wrongdoing or to admit that he, of himself, is in any way insufficient. He regards penitence as a threat to his security. The strong man can see in penitence a door to something new and wonderful. Far from being a threat to his security he knows it to be a way to a firmer and stronger security. So it was that the power of penitence to save became apparent to the thief. And he yielded himself to this new force and spoke to Jesus in contrition and faith, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And the miracle of salvation occurred at once. Some of the most thrilling words ever to be uttered by human lips were now spoken as Jesus turned to look at him and said, "Verily I say unto you, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Salvation means to be in right relationship to God and his purpose. There is a right relationship for every individual being and in every conceivable circumstance. The right rela-



tionship of the sinner to God is one of penitent contrition and trust. The exchange of words between the thief and Jesus Christ was the outward and audible sign of the inward and spiritual experience of salvation. It took place at once. There was no need to await the coming of death. Implicit in the promise of paradise soon to be entered was the fact of present right relationship: "Verily I say unto you, *this moment* we are united in the bond of peace, and therefore today and henceforth shalt thou be with me in paradise."

*O most mighty God, and merciful Father, who hast compassion upon all men, and who wouldest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his sin, and be saved; Mercifully forgive our trespasses; receive and comfort us who are grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins. Thy property is always to have mercy; to thee only it appertaineth to forgive sins. Spare us therefore, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed; enter not into judgment with thy servants; but so turn thine anger from us who meekly acknowledge our transgressions, and truly repent us of our faults, and so make haste to help us in this world, that we may ever live with thee in the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Lord, remember us when thou comest into thy kingdom. We are without strength to save ourselves or even to know the way. To look upon thee, O Lord, in thy beauty, is to see ourselves in our*



*weakness and misery. Thou hast cast thy spell upon us and we would be thine. Thou hast shown us the path of life and we would fain be with thee both now and in paradise. We bless thee for thy undiscourageable love and care; for thy great mercy; for thy patience with us, notwithstanding our many and great provocations; for the light and power to save that flows from thy full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice upon the cross. We beseech thee to accept our prayer and praise, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses for thine own sake to whom be all honor and glory, world without end.*

# *The Power of Love*

THE POWER to save is rooted deep in the redeeming nature of love. For love is the greatest force in the world and *beyond* the world. The Cross of Christ is proclaimed by our faith as the supreme evidence and pledge of the love divine: a love which is completely self-giving; a love glad to give up life for the sake of the beloved; a love which is content to risk everything upon its power to evoke a response in the hearts of men with no accompanying coercion whatsoever; a love willing to bear the consequences of rejection and to pay the price exacted by the law of moral retribution, a price which is rightfully owed by the object of this love but which is too great for humanity to be able to pay.

In our human sophistication, tinged with worldly cynicism, we are all too ready to suppose that it is not the part of wisdom to stake too much upon love. Yet an apostle called

the Cross "the wisdom of God." And that makes explicit the Christian claim that only in the light of the Cross shall we find a right and wise interpretation of ultimate reality. Of course the Cross, as supreme evidence of God's wisdom and love, is bound to demand a complete reordering of man's natural way of evaluating truth. It certainly upsets the standard by which man naturally measures power. It certainly mocks the goals of comfort and convenience and success and relaxation and peace of mind which modern society rates so supremely high as worthy ends to which a man can properly dedicate his strivings, and by which he can expect to be saved.

Power to save, in whatever aspect, is always shot through with the power of love. The Cross is the love of God in action; and that is why it is the source of atonement and salvation.

In the first two words from the Cross we saw the power of forgiveness and the power of contrition at their saving work, both being expressions of the power of love. Now in the third word we find an indication of the power to save as demonstrated in the relationships of a family. Family love, at its best and highest, is as pure and holy a love as can be found in human experience. It is in the relationship between a husband and a wife and in their relationship to their children that the opportunity is found for human love to be expressed at its most perfect and most intense. It is within the God-centered family that human love comes to its fullest flowering and fruition and overflows into the relationships of its members to all other people. Here we discover the clearest human reflection of the nature of God's love. Here we come nearest to knowing how God feels about his creatures



in our feelings for one another within the healthy, happy Christian family. Someone has gone so far as to declare that in the exaltation of the lover courting his beloved, we sense most accurately the character of God's love for each of his human children.

It is in living together in the peculiar intimacy of family life, in "the miracle of intimacy," (for it is a miraculous phenomenon and should never be taken for granted or regarded as commonplace) that we have the greatest opportunities for discovering and expressing the saving power of love and its capacity to transfigure human nature. It is within the framework of family relationships that we can best learn to be Christian and to know the meaning of elementary Christian morality, thereby discovering something of how to love God and one's neighbor. For it is true that we must *learn* how to love. No one knows naturally and instinctively how to love. To suppose that we do, and we are all too prone to suppose it, is the greatest obstacle in the way of learning.

Of course his family meant much to our Lord. He revealed by word and deed, through his earthly life and ministry, the deep significance of family relationships for all people. And ever since, those who call themselves by his Name, have invoked his presence for the sanctification of their homes. Man and wife first take their vows at Holy Matrimony in the Name of him who "beautified with his presence and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee," a wedding. Parents bring their babies to the sacrament of Holy Baptism in the Name of him who took little children into his arms, put his hands upon them and blessed them. And when at death the bonds of family life on this earth are temporarily

broken, families hold up their dead in prayer to him who said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

As our Lord looked upon his heartbroken mother at the foot of the Cross how He must have longed to withdraw the sword that pierced her heart, and to bear the wound in her stead! When we are called upon to see our beloved ones go through some bitter and painful experience, we feel that we can hardly stand it not to be able to take it for them. And when we are able to take upon our own shoulders even part of the burden which a loved one is called upon to bear, we find a kind of exhaltation deep within our hearts which gives us, as nothing else can, a glimpse of the meaning of self-sacrificing love and its power to save. Our Lord's own suffering and pain were intensified by his awareness of the grief of his mother and his inability to assuage it for her. She, on the other hand, was entering into the anguish of her Son by her presence and her yearning, thereby finding something of the mysterious spiritual transfiguration which flowers in the midst of self-forgetfulness and self-giving. The mystery of that transfiguration is an aspect of the state of salvation. And that is why we find the power to save inherent in the nature of the relationships of the God-centered family. And here from the Cross there comes our Lord's clear and unmistakable avowal of the deep and precious significance of this holy relationship within the family.

From the Christian point of view, family life is holy not because of the pleasure and the comfort and the happiness which an individual may find there for himself, but rather because of the peculiar opportunity it offers for self-forgetfulness and self-giving for the sake of others. This is enormously important to know and to remember. The chief



reason why family life and the marriage relationship so often lead to misery, turmoil, and finally a broken home is because so many people regard the whole thing as intended for their own personal enjoyment and comfort. Anyone who gets married chiefly in order to find happiness for himself, or in order to promote his own comfort, is doomed to fall into the morass of estrangement and conflict from which divorce, with its trail of wounded, disfigured souls, may be the only escape. On the other hand, the people who get married in order to devote the rest of life, so far as is humanly possible, to making their partners happy, will find in family life the power to save and the secret of sanctification.

As Saint Mary and Saint John stood side by side at the foot of the Cross, each was united to the other in the mystic bond of shared suffering. We have all heard references to the fellowship of pain, the fellowship of bereavement or the fellowship of sorrow. It makes little difference just what kind of suffering people share. The sharing brings to pass a sense of oneness and a bond of relationship that is mysteriously powerful to save and to uplift. When our Lord committed his mother to the care of his dearest friend, John, and asked her in turn to regard John as her son, He was aware of the depth of relationship between them which had already come to pass, and which was now strengthened and glorified in their shared sorrow to the point where it was of the same essence as blood-relationship.

When we are called upon to endure suffering and grief, we can find it intolerable and finally destructive if we nurse it alone in our hearts with self-pity or resentment. But if we reach out for contact with others who have been similarly afflicted, offering our compassion and friendship to them, we



find a saving power in the very thing which might otherwise destroy us. And that is one of the reasons why family life has within it the potential for salvation. For, in a very special and intimate sense, the members of a family can share with one another their sorrows as well as their joys.

To be saved from selfishness is certainly one of the chief needs of sinful man. And in his family a man finds, as nowhere else, the opportunity for that salvation. So it is that this third word from the Cross is regarded as indicative of the precious place held in our Lord's heart by family relations, and of his knowledge of the power to save which can be found so poignantly in those relations.

*Woman, behold thy son! Behold thy mother!*

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families; We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vain-glory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh; turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we be evermore kindly affectioned with brotherly love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*O God of love, who hast instituted for us the mystical union of holy matrimony and has wrought for us the miracle of intimacy in family relationships; Enable us to see more clearly the reflection of thy love in our homes. Teach us to love more truly that we may experience therein the power to save. Lead us in the paths of sacrifice and sharing that we may be delivered from the evil of selfishness. Transfigure our lives in the beauty of holiness and grant that we may follow with gladness the way of the Cross whereby our redemption was procured by thy blessed Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

## *The Power of Woe*

WE HAVE BEEN thinking about what it means to be saved, and about the kind of power required in the process. Now, in the fourth word from the Cross, we find an indication of what it means to be lost—just the opposite of being saved. And we find some additional light cast upon the meaning of salvation and upon the urgent need for salvation when we turn our attention to the woe and misery of lostness.

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

These words show that our Lord, "who every grief hath known that wrings the human breast," truly experienced what it means to be lost. He escaped none of life's most dismal and tragic aspects, even to the extent of supposing himself cut off from the assurance of God's presence—the most fundamental and essential basis of security—without which no human being, even the most hardened and sophisticated, can indefinitely maintain his equilibrium.



Do you know what it means to be lost? Do you know what it means to be lost and found again? Do you know what the father meant, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, when he said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found"?

Perhaps most of us do not know from experience what it means to be lost in the most desperate sense, either physically or morally, as was the prodigal son. On the other hand, there are perhaps few indeed who have not experienced something of what it means to be lost spiritually: cut off from our sense of ultimate security and from the certainty of the presence of God. And we do well to exercise our imagination on the subject, seeking to sharpen the awareness of our urgent predicament, and of the glory of being found. For in our pride and self-sufficiency, we all tend to deny the extent of our lostness and to be less than fully aware of our need to be found and saved.

People who have been lost in the woods have returned to tell us of their experience. And from them we can paint the picture in our own minds and hearts. There comes the moment in such cases when a person, quite inadvertently and unaware of having wandered away, suddenly realizes that he is cut off from his companions and from any recognizable landmark. Imagine the sudden gripping of the heart by the cold and clammy fingers of panic! Imagine the sudden realization of one's helplessness and of the possible fate ahead which momentarily grows more probable! Imagine the discovery that you have only gone in a circle while desperately attempting to find a path which leads to safety! Night comes down, the temperature drops, your cries are unanswered. Terror tightens its grasp upon you. It is indeed

a devastating and soul-shaking thought. Even to imagine it is an experience in the depths of woe. Can you then sense or imagine what it would be like, at such a moment, to hear a voice calling? Can you picture yourself starting in the direction of that voice, finding that it grows louder and more distinct as you draw nearer? Can you imagine what it would be like to catch the first sight of your rescuer, to call out in recognition, to grasp his hand and to breathe a prayer of thanksgiving from the depths of your heart? Well, that is what is meant by being lost and being found again.

A person can be just as lost, just as unspeakably in need of being saved, without being caught at night in the woods. One can be just as lost and afflicted in the darkness of despair. One can be just as deeply dismayed and terrorized by the loss of any sense of purpose in life, by the loss of any satisfying scale of values, or by an uncertainty of God's love and care. One can be just as lost and devastated by the awareness of being suffocated in the dungeon of sin, or in the dismal morass of suffering and sorrow with no knowledge of a way out. Such experiences in one form or another, to one degree or another, are common to the vast majority of human beings. And the awareness that our Lord himself went down into that black pit has always been a source of greatest assurance and comfort to Christian people as they turn to him in all manner of woe and grief.

One can also be just as lost and even more pitiable in the quicksands of worldly superficiality and the false security of material bulwarks;—and without any awareness of being lost at all! In Holy Scripture we are reminded of this possible eventuality in very vivid words: "You say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing'; not knowing that you are



(in reality) wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." Loss is universal to human life. And apart from the grace of God which seeks us out and finds us, and apart from his power to save, we are destined only for hopeless destruction.

The power to save flows into a man most effectively and irresistibly when he has come to his wits' end; when he has relinquished all trust in human resourcefulness to save; when he knows most poignantly that he desires desperately to be saved. It is a mysterious fact of life that the surest trysting place between a man and his God is so often found in that apparently dismal and fearful valley of darkness and despair which we know as wits' end. Indeed it appears inescapably true that human woe has its part to play in the discovery and experience of God's power to save.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

There is, of course, much mystery which surrounds these poignant words of desolation. But we believe we are not far wrong when we find in them evidence of our Saviour's having entered into the actual experience of being lost and found. And because of that He commands the confidence and trust which only the authority of firsthand knowledge can evoke in the reluctant spirit of man.

There is ample evidence in Holy Scripture that our Lord was aware, in considerable degree, of having a very special part in the inscrutable purpose of God's redemptive love. The universal opinion of the most enlightened scholarship bears out the fact that He knew his mission was unique in all history. But we must recognize, nonetheless, that his understanding was dimmed by the limitations of human knowing. He was truly man as well as divine. The Crucifixion is not just a play in which Jesus, with completely divine



omniscience, acts a part in the attempt to make his humanness look real for the sake of its effect upon the spectators. He has now experienced and absorbed in actuality the dread power of despair and forsakenness in which men so often lose their bearings and become lost. His emergence from this dismal state of desolation, soon to be made apparent in his glad and triumphant self-commitment to God, makes vivid the ever-searching love which never ceases to pursue and to regain the lost souls of men, even when they are sure that He has forsaken them.

Here is enacted, in a profoundly moving way, the actuality of God's power to save. He who is both Victim and Saviour, who was sought and found in the midst of his most bitter woe, is become now and forever the Searcher and Shepherd himself who saves us by the power of his self-identification with us all. Of him who said, "I am the good shepherd . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep," we sing with unspeakable gratitude and adoration:

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,  
But yet in love he sought me,  
And on his shoulder gently laid,  
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

*O God, Almighty and merciful, who healest those that are broken in heart, and turnest the sadness of the sorrowful to joy; Let thy fatherly goodness be upon all that thou hast made. Remember in pity such as are this day destitute, homeless, or forgotten of their fellow-men. Bless the congrega-*

*tion of thy poor. Uplift those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all discouraged and unhappy people, and by thy heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose penury tempteth them to sin; though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they be perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him, who for our sakes became poor, thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*Blessed Jesus, who hast known every grief that wrings the human breast, who hast entered into the experience of desolation and woe in supposing that God had forsaken thee and hast finally conquered sin and death; Be with us in our dark valleys of despair, seek after us when we are lost, awaken us when we put our trust in things and know not that we are lost; lead us to that trysting place with thee at the end of our own resourcefulness when we no longer know which way to turn. Save us, enlighten us, strengthen us for thine own sake, to whom be glory now and forever.*

vi

# *The Power of Suffering*

*I thirst.*

The fifth time our Lord spoke from the Cross, He said simply these two words. This is the first indication of his own bodily anguish, even though He had been hanging there in the sun for hours. The two overshadowing facts about this expression of physical suffering are that He gave voice to it at all and that He spoke with such incredible restraint.

That He *did* declare this fact of bodily anguish destroys any validity in the so-called Christian Science idea (so unchristian and so unscientific) that physical pain and suffering are illusions. To us who call him Lord, it appears sacrilegious to suppose that his thirst was only in his imagination, or



that his anguish was due to error in himself. This is not to be regarded as a fatal flaw in his make-up whereby He allowed the flesh to triumph over the spirit. Nor are we to permit ourselves in any way to toy with the many variations, so presently popular, on this theme of belittling the reality of the material creation. This is God's world, all of it. He is Creator of earth as well as heaven, of matter as well as spirit, of the body as well as the soul. The philosophy of dualism is abhorrent to Christian theology and all aspects of it are heresy which only beclouds our understanding.

The classic Gospel teaches us that Jesus Christ did not come into the world to remove all suffering from human life. Quite the contrary, He foretold bitter suffering for people as the result of their discipleship to him. He came to teach us how to suffer rather than how to avoid it. He came to teach us that suffering has a place in the mysterious scheme of redemption, and that it is intended to be transmuted into saving grace.

Thirst is a form of physical suffering of the most bitter and overwhelming sort. People who have been through the intolerable experience of thirst in its last, desperate stages have borne witness to the way in which it can destroy all vestiges of human decency and reduce men to appalling brutishness. We may be sure that Jesus—hanging for almost three hours now in that relentless, blistering oriental sun—was experiencing thirst of a sort unknown to most men. This was no illusion. It was physical suffering at its most devastating.

Despite his otherworldly quality of spirit and despite the extraordinary strength of his character, He was driven to give voice to the reality of his anguish of body. And because of that, Christian people have found, ever since, that a new

element of holiness and significance has been added to every form of ministration to the physical and bodily ills of mankind.

There are many ways in which we can minister to one another. To offer love and acceptance and kindness and compassion and sympathy and tolerance, and all such gifts of the spirit, is of the most urgent and profound importance. But ministration to the physical needs of our brethren takes no second place and can be just as valid an expression of religion and of spiritual values as preaching the Gospel to all mankind. Of course, it is not a question of "either/or," but forever a matter of "both/and."

Now the incredible restraint of our Lord, as He gave utterance to his suffering, also has important truth to convey. We poor mortals, in our folly and sin, tend to put too much emphasis upon physical needs, even to the exclusion of spiritual needs. For example, we find ourselves all too ready to confuse the coming of the kingdom of God upon earth with unending economic prosperity. We also fall easily into the trap of working so hard to provide our children with healthy bodies and comfortable homes that we neglect entirely, or almost entirely, the nourishing of their immortal souls. Again, we pour out our wealth without stint for the secular education of our youth and for preparing them to earn their living, while allowing the work of our Church to be crippled and thwarted for lack of adequate funds. We go to almost any extreme to provide our children with recreational facilities, with social opportunities, with toys and gadgets, while virtually neglecting their religious training as though there were no such word as eternity, and as though the Gospel of Jesus Christ had never been proclaimed. Isn't it strange and



pathetic and alarming how easily we wander into these dead-end streets? Isn't it tragic and frightening how blindly and even blithely we distort the eternal words of truth, and behave as though the things that are seen are eternal and the things that are not seen are unimportant?

The incredible restraint of our Lord in the face of physical suffering, beyond our power to encompass, is dramatic proof that, even though He admits the reality of physical need, He would not for a moment allow it to overshadow and obscure the greater aspects of his mortal passion. This great act of redemption, in which He is the central figure, cannot be allowed to be dominated by the claims of the flesh and the world, proper and just though they be in their place.

God knows that, in the ordinary course of human living in this highly complex and protected society of ours, there are not very many obvious and easily seen crises or turning points in which we can make clear-cut decisions while being fully aware of all that is at stake. Most of our decisions are made for good or bad without our being aware of how important they are. Most of the crises we face are so woven into the fabric of everyday living that we hardly recognize them as crises. And that is why the Church is so essential to our salvation. The Church offers us the opportunity for making decisions concerning obedience and loyalty and perseverance on the level of our habits and in the midst of our daily living. The Church offers us opportunities for serving our fellow men in the support of her mission which reaches out to mankind on the level of physical ministrations in her hospitals and schools, and on the level of spiritual ministrations in the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the sacraments. The decisions we make concerning the



life of the Church—even on the most routine level—and our place in it can be decisions for eternity, or against.

As we face the almost daily questions of convenience and comfort *versus* obligations to worship and to give of ourselves and of our money to his Church, we do well to think of his anguish as expressed so quietly in the words, "I thirst." And the same is true in all the day by day decisions for or against indulging and coddling one's self, for or against the many forms of egotism, time-serving, venality, covetousness, uncharitableness and all the rest. To contemplate his example, to espouse the truth He reveals, to draw close to him in trust and adoration, to rest in the sunlight of his strength and his love, supremely revealed here on the Cross, is to learn much of the power to save which flows so freely and so mightily from that event. To be saved is, among many things, to be shown how to think straight and how to relate ourselves properly to one another and to God's creation, both seen and unseen, into which by his will we are born for this span of mortal life.

Behold the Lamb of God, the Saving Victim, who meets and conquers the depths of pain and suffering, physically no less than spiritually, and who shows the way to its sanctification. Here indeed is power to save, not merely in seeing and acknowledging the truth He reveals, but also in the assurance of his presence and his sharing in the midst of all forms of suffering through which the sons of men are called to go.

*O Lord, our heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; We beseech thee to bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of their fellow men. Endue them with wisdom, patience, and courage to strengthen the weak and raise up those who fall; that, being inspired by thy love, they may worthily minister in thy Name to the suffering, the friendless and the needy; for the sake of him who laid down his life for us, the same thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*O most mighty and merciful God, in this time of grievous sickness, we flee unto thee for succour. Deliver us, we beseech thee, from our peril; give strength and skill to all those who minister to the sick; prosper the means made use of for their cure; and grant that, perceiving how frail and uncertain our life is, we may apply our hearts unto that heavenly wisdom which leadeth to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*Most blessed Jesus, who didst acknowledge the reality and poignancy of physical suffering as thou didst hang upon the Cross for our redemption; Have mercy upon us and strengthen us in our times of pain and grief. Fill our hearts with compassion for others, lest our trials make us selfish. Keep always before us the remembrance of thy*

*suffering whenever we are tempted to enlarge our troubles, to whine, to coddle or feel sorry for ourselves. Be near us and save us, dear Redeemer, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory world without end.*



# *The Power of the Cross*

MORE IMPORTANT than the power to generate electricity, more essential than the power to propel vehicles, more telling than the power to lift loads, mightier than the power of released explosions, is the power to win men's hearts, to change their wills, to woo, to persuade, to convince, to purify, to forgive and finally to save their souls. More far-reaching than the power to control, to manipulate, to rule, to suppress and to imprison is the power to lift from the hearts of men the burden of their guilt, to free them from anxiety and uncertainty as to the basic value of life. Far more important than the power to educate, to inform or to indoctrinate the minds of men is the power to ennoble, to elevate and to sanctify their souls. The power derived from learning is no match for the power inherent in love. The power of wealth and position can never equal the power of righteousness in

the eternal scheme of things. The power of success and prestige and achievement pales into insignificance beside the power of humility and courage and dedication in man's relationship to God. The power to inflict death upon the bodies of men is no rival to the power which can deliver men from the sting of death which is sin. The power of the Cross of Christ destroys the otherwise unchallenged pre-eminence of sin and darkness and death in their control over human life. The power of Christ, lifted up on the Cross, can draw all men unto him, chastened, liberated, enlightened, reassured and redeemed.

*It is finished.*

When our Lord said these words, He meant this mighty and mysterious act of redemption in which God was required, by the very nature of his own self-created order, to submit to the sorrow and suffering unleashed in the world by human sin and by the powers of darkness, absorbing those results within his own strength of love, and to endure the death of a malefactor as compensation for evil in a universe of moral law and of inevitable cause and effect.

To attempt to reduce this mystery to a simple, clearly understood formula is to destroy any hope of comprehension in the very act of attempting. Ours is to bow in faith and wonder, in fear and trembling, before the great affirmation of a truth which is shrouded in the inescapable mystery of God's nature, yet which proves its power to enlighten and to redeem men's souls as nothing else can.

"It is finished." This mighty act of redemption is complete. The special intrusion of God into the world's history, first apparent in Bethlehem's stable, unfolding its nature more and more as Jesus went through Galilee, and beyond the



Jordan, into Samaria and Capernaum, now has moved through Jerusalem and Gethsemane to the top of Calvary's hill.

The redemption of the world has been accomplished in such a setting, incredible as it seems. The battle with evil is done and the victory won. The conquest of sin and death is finished. His ministry in human flesh is completed. He has triumphed over every temptation which confronts the life of man, every grief, every test that tries the soul of man. The stage is set for the shout of triumph and the first fruits of his conquest.

The Christian Gospel declares that He "made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, . . . for the sins of the whole world." But we are not to suppose that this means the completeness of all its consequences. The resulting benefits of that finished act of redemption are still to reach their culmination. The reaping of the full harvest of his redemption remains to be accomplished in God's good time through the penitent appropriation by all men of the gift made accessible to them.

The redemptive power which flows from the Cross is power to relieve, to enlighten, to comfort, as well as to save. But it never ceases to be the Cross. And because it is the Cross, it can never be anything less than austere and uncompromising. It is always and essentially heroic; it tolerates no sentimentalizing. Its grief and suffering and stern reality can tolerate no version of the Gospel which is complacent or anemic or superficial. So far as this life is concerned, we are destined to find light and salvation in the midst of turbulence and tribulation, not in the twilight borderland of tranquility and sheltered repose. Any serenity in redemption is the

serenity of the hero. Any repose in the awareness of being saved is the repose of the victor, as the smoke of battle won begins to lift.

It is not easy either to preach or to hear the Gospel of salvation without blundering into a false complacency or self-indulgent quiescence. It is almost inevitable for us human beings to seize the outstretched hand of comfort while refusing to seize the other hand of discipline held forth at the same time. We grasp too readily the assurance of love, and reject the presence of judgment.

But here on the Cross, in this now-finished act of redemption, we see the creative power to save which stems from self-giving and discipline and suffering and sacrifice. And these realities, which might otherwise seem so forbidding and formidable and so much to be avoided, now appear in their true light as part of God's mysterious plan of redemption. So, each time we look, we can take a step in the direction of making friends with life's ever present aspects of hardship and pain and tribulation, knowing that they are not alien, senseless intruders, but rather sources of potential glory and strength and victory.

The mighty act is finished. The power to save is both unleashed and dramatically demonstrated. The battle is won, the victory secured and the enemy brought into subjection. It is finished. He is ready to die. And in a moment He will do so with words on his lips that reveal the ultimate in human fulfillment and achievement.

*O God, merciful Father, who despisest not the sighing of a contrite heart, nor the desires of such*



*as are sorrowful; Mercifully assist our prayers which we make before thee in all our troubles and adversities, whensoever they oppress us; and graciously hear us, that those evils which the craft and subtilty of the devil or man worketh against us, may, by thy good providence, be brought to nought; that we thy servants, being hurt by no persecutions, may evermore give thanks unto thee in thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*Above all, we adore thy mercy in sending thy only Son into the world, to redeem us from sin and eternal death, and in giving us the knowledge and sense of our duty towards thee.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*O Blessed Saviour of the world, we bow before the mystery of the atonement on the cross in fear and trembling, yet with deep and grateful joy in thy power to save. Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee, that the fruits of this mighty act of redemption may come to full harvest when thou shalt come again in thy glorious majesty. Grant that as we now receive thee for our Redeemer, so we may, with sure confidence, behold thee when thou shalt come to be our Judge, and be found an acceptable people in sight of thee, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory world without end.*

# *The Power of Trust*

IN MOST INSTANCES of common speech our use of the word "power" is so deeply involved with the idea of physical or material force that it is hard to distinguish spiritual power. We find the word "influence" more congenial when it comes to our ideas of spiritual values. Yet power is a stronger and, therefore, the more accurate word. For spiritual power, and the power to save in particular, is by far and away the most significant and most final kind of power in the whole universe.

We have thought together about what mankind needs to be saved *from* and also what mankind needs to be saved *for*. We must be saved from aimlessness, and from the deeply disquieting anxiety which results from uncertainty as to whether or not there is any real purpose in living. We must be saved from the corrosion of guilt, from the devastation of

lovelessness, from the asphyxiation of egotism, and from the misery of basic insecurity.

We must be saved for our destiny in heaven. We must be saved for the beauty of holiness and for the glory of righteousness. We must be saved for the intended fruition of our manhood and womanhood. We must be saved for final rest in God. And above all we must be saved for love, the greatest of all virtues, without which a man is counted dead before God. Yes, above all for love which covereth a multitude of sins and which is the essence of the nature of God himself, and the end for which we were born.

In Jesus Christ, our Lord, we see the perfect example of a man who is saved, and a perfect example of the power which saves us. As his passion comes to its end, we witness the wonder and beauty of complete trust and total self-commitment to God which are so much a part of the way of salvation.

In the prayer book there is a beautiful collect which says: "O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be our strength; By the might of thy Spirit, lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God . . ." Jesus now shows the glory of that returning and rest whereby a man is saved, that quietness and confidence which is true strength. Now he is lifted by the might of the Spirit to the presence of God where He can be still in the perfect knowledge that God is God. And He utters the quiet, final words.

*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*

He yields himself to death without misgiving, knowing that it is part of God's beneficent plan. He sees death as the



door to a new and higher order of life. He shows what is meant by being saved in returning and rest. The turbulence and strife and sorrow and suffering are ended. Their part in the mystery of earthly life has been accomplished.

Jesus knew no more than we what the exact nature is of that upon which He now embarked. Our Lord lived upon this earth under the same limitations of human knowing to which we are subject. His last words are truly the expression of human commitment to the unknown. He demonstrates the saving power of trust of the same sort open to us. And mysteriously enough, as we gaze upon him and adore the wonder of his grace and strength, we feel something of the power of his serenity flowing into our own hearts, and we sense its capacity to save. "In returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength." We know here, as nowhere else, that this is true. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," He said. And our hearts reply, "Father, grant us something of the saving power of that confidence so that we, too, may commit our spirits, and the souls of all who are dear to us, into thy loving and almighty hands."

With all our striving and getting and grasping at what we believe to be valuable, shall we not bend more of our energy and concentrate more of our desiring upon the getting and the firm grasping of this kind of trust in God and this sort of self-commitment to his hands? For this is to discover the meaning of salvation and to experience the effects of the power to save. With all our yearning and reaching for what we believe will bring satisfaction and fulfillment and ultimate security, shall we not set our wills and affections more purposefully toward the appropriating of this trust in God

which He so lovingly waits to bestow upon us at the first sign of genuine desiring and seeking?

Certainly it is not a condition of spirit which is going to come unbidden. Certainly it is not a gift which will be automatically handed to us at the critical moment when we need it most. Surely it will not assert its value in the eyes of the man who puts it far down the list of the things for which he strives and labors upon this earth. We must begin now to prepare ourselves for what lies ahead. It takes some doing, and some *sustained* doing, to arrange our scale of values so that it lists first things first.

Fortunately, it is not entirely up to us. A relatively small amount of outreaching on our part results in a downpouring from God far out of proportion to what we either desire or deserve. Here on the Cross is generated a saving power which flows into a receptive heart far more mightily than the degree of receptiveness justifies. Only a little honest and humble contemplation of the Cross, and only a relatively elementary desire to fathom something of its meaning, will bring to us insights and assurances out of proportion to what we are able to give. To form the habit of repeating these final words of our Lord, even when we feel quite the opposite—when we are desolate and lonely and God seems far away—is to find that the miracle of trust and confidence is being more and more wrought in our hearts.

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” That is both the declaration of the man who is saved and petition of the man who seeks to be saved. It is at once the song of triumph on the lips of him who has conquered, and the promise of salvation for him who is still in the midst of the battle.



“Father, give me grace and light so that I, too, may commit my spirit unto thee at all times and in all places; for that is to know indeed the peace and joy of thy saving power as shown to us and brought to us in the life of thy Son Jesus Christ, our everlasting Lord and Saviour.”

To trust God is to find salvation in the midst of all the forces which conspire to make us apprehensive, insecure, tense, guilt-ridden, neurotic and unloving. Trust in God is a source of power far beyond our ability to measure because no man, except Jesus, has attained it in full degree. Yet we know, deep within our most sensitive capacities to comprehend, that our need for trust is desperate and that it is the answer of answers to a host of human ills. We know that we are bedevilled by our inability to trust more fully and by our perverse forgetfulness of its immeasurable power to save us from the evils which alone are caused by its absence. All the hunger of the human spirit for the values suggested by the so widely and commercially exploited bromides—peace of mind, relaxation, adjustment and security—can be satisfied and relieved only by trust in God. It can be said with a startling degree of completeness that salvation is trust in God. All that we have thought about today—the assurance of forgiveness, the yielding to contrition, the releasing of love, the conquest of woe and suffering, the conviction of our redemption—all are rooted in and nourished by trust in God. A man's religion can well be centered in the unceasing importunity for trust (nay, it had better be!) if he is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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Now the sacred head falls forward as the last vestige of life flickers out in his precious body, given for us. The people standing by have noticed the final tremor in his emaciated frame and the sag of the lifeless form. They said that it was not necessary to break the legs, as was customary before removing a body in which some spark of life remained. But just to make sure, or just to dramatize the finality of it all, a soldier quite casually thrusts a spear deep into his motionless heart.

And so it is over. The mighty act of redemption is complete. The stage is set for the next move in God's supreme self-revelation. The Christian Gospel dares to proclaim that this broken, lifeless body is the outward and visible sign of the greatest and most significant power in all the creation and in all time, and that by that power the souls of men are saved for eternity.

*O most loving Father, who willest us to give thanks  
for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee,  
and to cast all our care on thee, who carest for us;  
Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anx-  
ieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life  
may hide from us the light of that love which is  
immortal, and which thou hast manifested unto us  
in thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us  
to thy never-failing care and love, for this life and  
the life to come; knowing that thou art doing for*

*them better things than we can desire or pray for;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The Book of Common Prayer

*And now, O Father, mindful of the love  
That bought us, once for all, on Calvary's tree,  
And having with us him that pleads above,  
We here present, we here spread forth to thee,  
That only offering perfect in thine eyes,  
The one true, pure, immortal sacrifice.*

*Look, Father, look on his anointed face,  
And only look on us as found in him;  
Look not on our misusings of thy grace,  
Our prayer so languid, and our faith so dim;  
For lo! between our sins and their reward,  
We set the passion of thy Son our Lord.*

*And then for those, our dearest and our best,  
By this prevailing presence we appeal;  
O fold them closer to thy mercy's breast!  
O do thine utmost for their souls' true weal!  
From tainting mischief keep them white and clear,  
And crown thy gifts with strength to persevere.*

*And so we come; O draw us to thy feet,  
Most patient Saviour, who canst love us still!  
And by this food, so awful and so sweet,  
Deliver us from every touch of ill:  
In thine own service make us glad and free,  
And grant us nevermore to part with thee.*

William Bright

\* \* \*



And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.

There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

*St. John 19:38-42*

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

*St. Matthew 27:62-66*



*He is risen, he is risen!*

*Tell it out with joyful voice:*

*He has burst his three days' prison;*

*Let the whole wide earth rejoice:*

*Death is conquered, man is free,*

*Christ has won the victory.*

# *The Power of the Resurrection*

It is a very common misapprehension to suppose that Easter's message is concerned first and foremost, if not quite exclusively, with the intent of God to insure a kind of automatic immortality to all human beings who have been through the experience of the death of the body. That is not the case, as any careful reading of the Scriptures will quickly reveal. In the first place, the idea of anything that even approaches what is implied by automatic immortality is entirely foreign to the most elementary Christian theology. Life beyond the grave, as Christianity teaches it, is the result of the performing of the miracle of raising from the dead by God himself. The resurrection of the dead, in which we profess our belief when we say the creed, is divine action, not just automatic cause and effect.



But even when we have recognized and made the distinction between resurrection in the Christian sense and immortality in the Greek sense, we are still mistaken if we regard the Easter message as in any degree exclusively concerned with a raising up after death. Easter's message cannot be isolated from the whole of the Christian Gospel. Easter cannot be separated from Good Friday, nor the Resurrection message severed from the message of the Crucifixion.

To start talking about being raised from the death of the body is to put the cart before the horse or, rather, to leave out the whole first half of the Easter message. The truth and glory of Easter's proclamation in its fulness is this: Those mortal souls that have been saved from the death of sin are also saved from the power of physical death to destroy. Or, to put it in slightly different words: Those who are raised from death in sin are also raised from death of the body. The power of the Cross to save is part and parcel of the resurrection of the dead. Listen to the inextricable mingling of the two in the words of the Church. First, note the words of these beloved Easter hymns:

Easter triumph, Easter joy,  
Sin alone can this destroy;  
From sin's power do thou set free  
Souls new-born, O Lord, in thee.

\* \* \*

Lord! by the stripes which wounded thee,  
From death's dread sting thy servants free,  
That we may live and sing to thee.

Alleluia!

Then study the second collect for Easter Day: "O God, who for our redemption didst give thine only-begotten Son to the death of the Cross, and by his glorious resurrection hast delivered us from the power of our enemy; Grant us so to die daily from sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through the same thy Son Christ our Lord." And so it goes all through the scriptural and liturgical language of Easter's message.

The Bible tells us that "the sting of death is sin." And when one has been saved from the power of sin to destroy, then the sting has been removed from death and it "hath no more dominion" over him. The Bible also says that "the wages of sin is death." And when one is released from sin, then the wages are cancelled and are not to be paid, because our Lord is willing to pay instead. That is the mystery of the doctrine of the Atonement, and you can no more eliminate it from Easter than you can the empty Tomb. To skip over or to underemphasize the problem of sin, when thinking about the Christian implications of the Resurrection, is to distort the whole business into a caricature of absurd sentimentalism and tragic self-delusion.

A fine text for Easter is found in the first verse of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians: "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Once that quickening from death in sin has occurred, then and only then, has the sting of death been removed, the wages of sin been cancelled, the quickened soul has been raised with Christ, and physical death is conquered. The power to save and the power of the Resurrection are all of a oneness. You cannot think in Christian terms about the life after death without first understanding what Christianity has to say



about sin. *Easter has nothing to say about life beyond the grave except to those who first listen carefully to what it has to say about salvation from sin.*

To suppose that physical death automatically rubs out all that has happened to a man in his earthly life, that the mere fact of death means automatic redemption, or that "all will be well in the end for everybody, no matter what" is a kind of fantasy religion, concocted and imagined in the popular mind but without any roots in the divine revelation of Holy Scripture and without any basis of fact in the classic theology of the Christian faith.

Jesus regarded physical death as a matter of relatively little significance, but He did not dismiss it as of no meaning. Anything so obviously and universally a part of God's plan must have some significance and meaning of its own. As all men do, Jesus recoiled instinctively from the experience of death for himself. That experience can never be anything other than deeply solemn and profoundly moving to all mankind. For it is a stepping out into the completely unknown. It is a demand for total self-commitment into the hands of God with no shred of self-sufficiency left and with no trace of reservation or qualification. And such a degree of self-commitment is inevitably a profoundly disturbing and shocking experience to the human ego despite its potentially redeeming power.

This demand for total self-commitment gives us a clue to one aspect, at least, of God's purpose in making death a part of his plan. We were made for him and only in commitment to him shall we be fulfilled. We can avoid or run away from such commitment all through our lives. But God has the last word and death is his way of saying, "Now you *must*



commit yourself, whether you like it or not, and it must be a total commitment." It appears that God is determined to save us for himself, and this in spite of ourselves if necessary. Yet it is still a disturbing and shocking thing for us to face death because we instinctively shrink from what is so totally unknown, and so completely final, so far as this world is concerned.

Jesus recognized and actually experienced all that as He stood at the threshold of physical death. But, none the less, He did not regard it as the major tragedy of human experience or as the unconquerable enemy of the human spirit. To him it was of far less moment than the kind of death which results from a man's being separated from God by the dread power of sin.

He met his own death on the Cross with a most incredible serenity and confidence, except for one fleeting moment. For that one moment his equanimity appeared disturbed because He experienced, as all men do at one time or another, to some extent or another, the fear lest God had forsaken him. And the reason why his amazing confidence appeared shaken for an instant by that was his tremendous conviction that the only really serious and really devastating tragedy which could happen to a human soul is separation from God which can be caused by sin. All of his life He had been so acutely conscious of the dread power of sin to kill and so painfully aware of how widespread was its murderous effect in the lives of the people among whom He ministered, that even He, in his sinlessness, had an instant when that awful tragedy appeared so close to him that it seemed as though He himself were involved.

Jesus once said, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body,

and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, who after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell." And all the New Testament is full of the truth that the only death to fear is death in sin, that physical death is of relatively little consequence so far as enduring tragedy is concerned. So also is the New Testament full of the glorious truth that in Jesus Christ is to be found salvation from the power of sin to destroy. Easter, with its stupendous proclamation and demonstration of God's power to raise a man from the death of the body, is the culmination and fulfillment of the Gospel's message of redemption from sin.

What then, is our part? What is there for us to do about it? How does this affect our own lives and attitudes and habits? Ours is to bow down before the Lord of life in humility and penitence, acknowledging our sinfulness or self-centeredness (which are the same thing), admitting honestly our total inability to forgive or to justify or to save ourselves. Ours is then to commit ourselves joyously and gratefully to his love and mercy, trusting him to do for us what is most expedient for us and what is more than we either desire or deserve. Ours is to repudiate sin and egotism, hating and dreading its power instead of attempting to rationalize or to "white-wash" our behavior.

That fact of the matter is that Easter has no really significant message for him that is unaware of sin or undisturbed by its destructive power in his own life. Such people, if there are any, can simply hear the sounds of joy and sense the glory of the spirit which prevails, but cannot possibly know what it really means. But from the beginning, those countless souls, oppressed and bound by the dread aware-



ness of sin, have found on this day a message of promise and assurance beyond their highest hopes. To such it is the privilege of the Christian preacher each year to reaffirm and to proclaim again the wondrous word of redemption and resurrection.

"You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins."

"You who were dead in trespasses, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven you all trespasses."

"And so let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. And be ye thankful."

*Blessed Lord Jesus, who by thy death didst take away the sting of death and by thy resurrection hast restored to us everlasting life; Grant us in true penitence and humility to confess our sins, and in firm faith to accept thy forgiveness, that, knowing ourselves to be redeemed by thy sacrifice on the Cross, we many commit ourselves and all who are dear to us to thy never failing care and love for this life and the life to come, and may rejoice in the assurance of the power of thy resurrection to bring us all to paradise with thee, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be praise and glory forever.*